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History - Essays

The Founder's Tolerance

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Introduction

William Penn, who grew up amidst in 17th Century England the religious wars between the Cavaliers and the Roundheads, was the prototype American advocate of religious toleration. As the proprietor of Pennsylvania, he wrote into the colony's laws in 1682: "That all persons living in this province who confess and acknowledge the one almighty and eternal God to be the creator, upholder, and ruler of the world, and that hold themselves obliged in conscience to live peaceably and justly in civil society, shall in no ways be molested or prejudiced for their religious persuasion or practice in matters of faith and worship, nor shall they be compelled at any time to frequent or maintain any religious worship, place or ministry whatever."[1]

Such religious toleration, however, was not the norm in the early American colonies. "The Europeans of Massachusetts reacted to insecurity by enforcing orthodoxy of religious belief and practice," wrote legal scholar Martha C. Nussbaum. "John Cotton, pastor of the First Church of Boston and one of Massachusetts's most influential religious leaders, wrote copiously in defense of religious persecution, arguing that it was necessary for civil order. It was also God's will, Cotton said, in order to separate the diseased element of society from the healthy element.... Cotton urged imprisonment, banishment, and other harsh penalties for the unorthodox."[2]

Colonial America was an amalgam of different religious traditions although different Christian denominations predominated in separate colonies: Congregationalists in New England, Dutch Reformed in New York, Quakers in Pennsylvania, Roman Catholics in Maryland, and Anglicans in the South. Historian Garry Wills wrote that when the Second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia in 1775: "Many things set colony apart from colony on their shared 'home ground' - among them, religion, a subject intimately bound up with men's politics. Joseph Galloway feared the 'congregationalist presbyterian republicans' flooding into his city [Philadelphia]. Others feared doing business with the Quakers, who would not stand firm where fighting was involved. Samuel Adams, who denounced even a Congregationalist like Thomas Hutchinson as papistical, now sat down to meals with the genuine article in [Roman Catholic] Charles Carroll."[3]

Among the predominant religious strains there settled smaller groups - Baptists in western Virginia, Lutherans in Pennsylvania, Presbyterians in New York. Because Maryland and Rhode Island and Pennsylvania had several religious strains, they became centers of religious dissent, diversity and tolerance. Norman Cousins wrote: "Purely as a practical matter, it became necessary to underwrite religious freedom for all in order to avoid an almost inevitable contest for power among the various denominations, many of which had ample reason to fear each other." Cousins wrote: "The religions of the colonies, like the peoples themselves, had neither a common origin nor a dominant evolving character. The main differences in religion were regional, but even within the regions themselves there were interesting mixtures."[4] Americans managed to overcome those differences. "[The] delegates to the Continental Congress," noted historian Derek Davis, "despite being men of considerably diverse faith commitments, were able for the most part to achieve consensus on their political goals. Most of the delegates...understood those goals to some degree in religious terms and thus were not reluctant to combine religious zeal with political responsibility."[5]

Meeting in September 1774, the First Continental Congress nearly broke up on the issue of whether anyone could pray a prayer of divine guidance that they all delegates could accept. Actually, Massachusetts delegate Samuel Adams was trying to bring it together. Adams had a common touch; he was known in Boston as "Sam the Publican" for the politics he conducted in the city's taverns. He was also known as "the last of the Puritans" for his strict piety. In Philadelphia Adams engineered a dispute so that he could defuse some intra-colonial mistrust. Biographer Mark Puls wrote: "Adams knew that many in the Congress mistrusted Massachusetts on religious grounds. Massachusetts Puritans had historically been intolerant of various sects, especially the Anglican Church, which was popular in several southern colonies. Adams had written in opposition to the establishment of an episcopate of the English church in America because it would strengthen British authority."[6] Adams, however, pushed fellow Massachusetts delegate Thomas Cushing to propose that Congress be opened by a prayer.

Adams probably anticipated the negative response. Historian Walter Stahr wrote: "John Jay and John Rutledge of South Carolina expressed concern that 'we were so divided in religious sentiments, some Episcopalians, some Quakers, some Anabaptists, some Presbyterians, and some Congregationalists,' that it would be uncomfortable for some to 'join in the same act of worship.'"[7] Sam Adams then bridged the religious divide by proposing that a minister of the Episcopal Church - to which both Jay and Rutledge belonged - do the prayer honors. Adams, according to his fellow Massachusetts delegate and cousin John Adams, "said that he was no bigot, and could hear a Prayer from any gentleman of Piety and virtue, who was at the same time a friend to his country."[8] Sam understood the realities of politics and religion, later writing that "many of our warmest Friends are Members of the Church of England."[9]

Using the text of Psalm 35, the Rev. Jacob Duché instantly united the diverse religious adherents. "After this Mr. Duche, unexpected to every Body struck out into an extemporary Prayer, which filled the Bosom of every Man present. I must confess I never heard a better Prayer or one, so well pronounced," John Adams, Sam's cousin, wrote home.[10] Sam himself wrote that "the lessons of the day and prayer were read by the Rev. Mr. Duche who afterwards made a most excellent extemporary prayer, by which he discovered himself to be a gentleman of sense and piety, and a warm advocate for the religious and civil rights of America."[11] Rhode Island's Samuel Ward wrote that Duché's prayer was "one of the most sublime, catholic, well-adapted prayers I ever heard."[12] Pennsylvania delegate Jose Reed observed that Cushing and Adams "never were guilty of a more masterly stroke of policy, than in moving that Mr. Duché might read prayers. I has had a very good effect."[13] Sam Adams biographer John Chester Miller wrote that Duché's prayer was an unparalleled success: 'even Quakers shed tears,' it was said; one delegate declared it was worth riding a hundred miles to hear; and John Adams believed that not even Dr. Cooper of Boston, the mightiest of the 'black regiment,' could have interceded with the Lord for Boston's salvation with greater fervor."[14]

Such religious tolerance was to become a hallmark of the Founding - although Sam Adams himself still harbored deep prejudices about Quakers and Catholics. Quakers continued to grate on Sam Adams throughout the Revolutionary War. In August 1778 he wrote that "These Quakers are in general a sly artful People, not altogether destitute, as I conceive, of worldly Views in their religious Profession....I dare say they have in their Hearts as perfect a System of Uniformity of Worship in their Way, and are busily employed about spiritual Domination as ever Laud himself was."[15] Always privately pious, Sam's public utterances took on a different tone. Adams biographer John K. Alexander wrote: "Once war erupted and throughout the war years...he routinely employed religious allusions. He was also much more inclined to see, and seek God's intervention in America's affairs. In May 1775, praising Massachusetts for observing a day of fasting and humiliation, he proclaimed that 'it is upon the Blessing of God alone that we must depend for the happy Issue to our virtuous Struggle.'"[16] In 1777, the Continental Congress was driven out of Philadelphia by the British occupation. It reconvened in York, Pennsylvania. Historian Ira Stoll wrote that Samuel Adams "inspiring" speech in York, Pennsylvania: "the religious themes he struck in his York speech - that the Americans were like the biblical Israelites of Exodus, and that God was intervening directly on their side - are essential for understanding the American Revolution."[17]

Religious scholar Steven Waldman: "Part of Congress's evolution toward pluralism probably resulted from the simple fact that it was the most religiously diverse body most of the delegates had ever encountered. It included Episcopalians, Congregationalists, Quakers, Presbyterians, Universalists, Dutch Reformed, Lutherans, Baptists, Methodists, and even a Catholic."[18] When a three-man congressional delegation to Catholic Canada was named in early 1776, Catholic Charles Carroll of Maryland was appointed. He was asked bring along his cousin, the 41-year-old Reverend John Carroll. Father Carroll would become "Superior of the Missions" in America and later the first Roman Catholic Bishop in the United States. The delegates were not above using religion for political advantage.

John Adams, like Sam no lover of the Roman Catholic church, agreed with the decision. Religion was one of many things dividing delegates to the Continental Congress and one of many things the delegates would have to overcome. Historian Garry Wills described the differences: "New Yorkers, who had barred an Anglican bishop from the Continent, found in Carroll a man working to set up a Roman episcopate here. Edmund Pendleton, who had prosecuted dissenting preachers, was forced to smile at a tough puritan like Roger Sherman, who would not let Silas Deane's carriage travel on the sabbath during their trip from Connecticut. Congregationalists, who thought even Harvard was 'deist,' sat with graduates from dissolute William and Mary. An unfrocked clergyman (Lyman Hall) ate with the zealous Dr. [John] Witherspoon," a leading Presbyterian clergyman.[19]

Not all was ecumenical heaven in America or even in Philadelphia. John Adams wrote about an incident in which he and several other New England delegates to the Continental Congress were invited to a meeting with Philadelphians at Carpenters Hall in 1774. John wrote that "to my great surprise found the hall almost full of people, and a great number of Quakers seated at the long table with their broad-brimmed beavers on their heads. We were invited to seats among them, and informed that they had received complaints, from some Anabaptists and some Friends in Massachusetts, against certain laws of that Province, restrictive of the liberty of conscience, and some instances were mentioned in the General Court, and in the courts of justice, in which Friends and Baptists had been grievously oppressed. I know not how my colleagues felt, but I own I was greatly surprised and somewhat indignant, being, like my friend Chase, of a temper naturally quick and warm, at seeing our State and her delegates thus summoned before a self-created tribunal, which was neither legal nor constitutional."[20]

At the meeting, one Quaker leader, Isaac Pemberton, lectured the delegates on the "importance" of "liberty of conscience. The laws of New England, and particularly of Massachusetts, were inconsistent with it, for they not only compelled men to pay to the building of churches and support of ministers, but to go to some known religious assembly on first days, etc.; and that he and his friends were desirous of engaging us to assure them that our State would repeal all those laws and place things as they were in Pennsylvania." John Adams reported that he replied "that the laws of Massachusetts were the most mild and equitable establishment of religion that was known in the world; if indeed they could be called an establishment; that it would be in vain for us to enter in any conferences on such a subject, for we knew beforehand our constituents would disavow all we could do or say for the satisfaction of those who invited us to this meeting. That the people of Massachusetts were as religious and conscientious as the people of Pennsylvania; that their consciences dictated to them that it was their duty to support those laws, and therefore the very liberty of conscience, which Mr. Pemberton invoked, would demand indulgence for the tender consciences of the people of Massachusetts, and allow them to preserve their laws; that it might be depended on, this was a point that could not be carried; that I would not deceive them by insinuating the faintest hope, for I knew they might as well turn the heavenly bodies out of their annual and diurnal courses, as the people of Massachusetts at the present day from their meeting-house and Sunday laws."[21]

Religious tolerance was a growth experience for most Founders. Philadelphia physician Benjamin Rush was by nature more religious and more ecumenical than many of his colleagues. Historian Gordon S. Wood wrote that "Rush was very excited by the enthusiasm shown by Americans at a fete held in Philadelphia in July 1782 in honor of the birth of the heir to the French crown. He realized that Protestant Americans were now eagerly celebrating what they had been long taught to hate - the French Catholic monarchy. The fete, he said 'shows us in the clearest point of view that there are no prejudices so strong, no opinions so sacred and no contradictions so palpable, that will not yield to the love of liberty.'"[22] Rush, a Pennsylvania delegate, would undergo his own religious pilgrimage during his own long life.

For most Founders like John Adams, religion was also a personal subject, not a matter of public discussion. Norman Cousins wrote that "the founders had a deep respect for the spiritual urge in man. They believed that religious experience was an intensely personal one, and they were historically mindful of the ease with which religious tended to be arrayed against each other, often at the expense of religion itself."[23] Adams biographer James Grant wrote: "Religious intolerance was the rock on which New England had been founded, but tolerance was the creed of the founders of the United States; Adams more and more professed freedom of worship."[24] In 1785, Adams wrote: "When all men of all religions consistent with morals and property, shall enjoy equal liberty, property or rather security of property, and an equal chance for honors and power, and when government shall be considered as having in it nothing more mysterious or divine than other arts or sciences, we may expect that improvements will be made in the human character and the state of society."[25]

Tolerance did not necessarily increase with age. Over time, John Adams became increasingly intolerant of many Christian denominations and religious dogmas. "There is something more cheerful and comfortable in an Episcopalian than in a Presbyterian Church. I admire a great Part of the divine Service at Church very much. It is very human and benevolent, and sometimes pathetic & affecting: but rarely gloomy, if ever. Their creeds I could dispense with very well because, the Scriptures being before Us contain the Creed the most certainly orthodox."[26] Adams was a frequent critic of elites - in politics, business and religion. "I wish You could live a Year in Boston, hear their Divines, read their publications, especially the Repository. You would see how spiritual Tyranny and ecclesiastical Domination are beginning in our Country: at least struggling for birth," former President Adams wrote former President Thomas Jefferson in 1813. But Adams understood the need for governmental neutrality: "Checks and Ballances, Jefferson, however you and your Party may have derided them, are our only Security, for the progress of Mind, as well as the Security of Body. Every Species of these Christians would persecute Deists, as soon as either Sect would persecute another, if it had unchecked and unballanced Power. Nay, the Deists would persecute Christians, and Atheists would persecute Deists, with as unrelenting Cruelty, as any Christians would persecute them or one another. Know thyself, human Nature!"[27]

Tolerance had its limits even for the most prominent Founders. No matter how much some Founders might value toleration for their own beliefs, they could be very suspicious of other religious institutions and their clergy. Historian Edwin S. Gaustad wrote that "one found in the revolutionary era and well after much uncertainty about the limits or implications of full religious liberty. Some wanted only so much liberty as was conductive to social order; others wanted only so much liberty as was supportive of Protestantism or of Christianity. Still others proclaimed liberty in stentorian tones only to reveal in concomitant actions that they hardly understood the central terms. Some worried that the state might be hobbled or hypnotized by the church; others worried that the church might be corrupted or seduced by the allurements of civil power."[28] Religious liberty was a relative and fluid concept as Americans struggled to define how to accept politically that with which they disagreed theologically. Historian Charles B. Stanford noted: "Religious toleration was an advance over the religious wars of the preceding centuries, but there was an inherent arrogance when the established church proclaimed that it would tolerate the mistaken doctrines of some sects that were not too objectionable but not those of others."[29]

Evangelical Christians in states like Virginia were often in need of government toleration, but advocated government support of religion in other areas. Historian Gordon S. Wood wrote: "The nineteenth-century evangelical denominations knew Americans lived in a free country and could choose their religion at will, but this freedom and the lack of a traditional establishment did not mean that government had no responsibility for religion. The evangelicals repeatedly urged the United States government to recognize America's basis in Christianity by providing chaplains in Congress, proclaiming days of fasting and prayer, and ending mail delivery on the Sabbath."[30]

Benjamin Franklin

A spirit of religious tolerance increasingly motivated many leading Founders - even when then had sharply critical views of some religious denominations. Pennsylvania's Benjamin Franklin was anti-Quaker as a young man but shifted his position over time. "With one question in mind - Is virtue being promoted? Franklin sampled a variety of worship services," wrote Steven Waldman. "Franklin marveled at how despite being the objects of persecution themselves, Christians were inexorably drawn toward oppressing others."[31] As a newspaper publisher, Franklin was in a better position to propagate his beliefs than most politicians. Franklin biographer Alfred Owen Aldridge wrote that "Franklin used the Gazette as an organ of concealed deism and open latitudinarianism. In it he published nothing in favor of evangelical Christianity until 1739, when he came in contact with an English evangelist on a triumphant tour of the colonies, George Whitefield, a personality in his own way as vigorous and brilliant as Franklin."[32] Ever in search of ways to promote civic improvement, Franklin championed the charismatic Whitefield, an Irish Presbyterian preacher whose sermons compared very favorably to the very dull homilies that Franklin was accustomed to hearing. Franklin later wrote:

> In 1739 arrived among us from Ireland the Reverend Mr. Whitefield, who had made himself remarkable there as an itinerant preacher. He was at first permitted to preach in some of our churches; but the clergy, taking a dislike to him, soon refused him their pulpits, and he was obliged to preach in the fields....The multitudes of all sects and denomination that attended his sermons were enormous, and it was matter of speculation to me, who was one of the number, to observe the extraordinary influence of his oratory on his hearers, and how much they admired and respected him, notwithstanding his common abuse of them, by assuring them they were naturally half beasts and half devils. It was wonderful to see the change soon made in the manners of our inhabitants. From being thoughtless or indifferent about religion, it seemed as if all the world were growing religious, so that one could not walk through the town in an evening without hearing psalms sung in different families of every street.
>
> And it being found inconvenient to assemble in the open air, subject to its inclemencies, the building of a house to meet in was no sooner proposed, and persons appointed to receive contributions, but sufficient sums were soon received to procure the ground and erect the building, which was one hundred feet long and seventy broad, about the size of Westminster Hall; and the work was carried on with such spirit as to be finished in a much shorter time than could have been expected. Both house and ground were vested in trustees, expressly for the use of any preacher of any religious persuasion who might desire to say something to the people at Philadelphia; the design in general; so that even if the Mufti of Constantinople were to send a missionary to preach Mohammedanism to us, he would find a pulpit at his service."[33]

Whitefield was both a religious leader and a cultural phenomenon that Franklin helped promote. Scholar Steven Waldman wrote: "Whitefield was the most important leader in the period known as the Great Awakening." According to Waldman: "Once Whitefield arrived, Franklin offered saturation coverage of his every move, including the huge crowds in Charleston and Wilmington and the money he was raising for an orphanage in Georgia."[34] Whitefield's decision to raise funds to build an orphanage in Georgia was controversial - even for Franklin who "thought it would have been better to have built the house there [in Philadelphia] and brought the children to it." Nevertheless, Franklin attended a fund raising sermon by Whitefield: "I perceived he intended to finish with a collection, and I silently resolved he should get nothing from me. I had in pocket a handful of copper money, three or four silver dollars, and five pistoles in gold. As he proceeded I began to soften, and concluded to give the coppers. Another stroke of his oratory made me ashamed of that, and determined me to give the silver; and he finished so admirably, that I emptied my pocket wholly into the collector's dish, gold and all."[35]

Franklin was not wholly disinterested in Whitefield's success. Historian Walter A. McDougall wrote: "Ben neglected to mention he himself promoted the preacher's crusade because it earned him windfall profits from printing and selling religious books and tracts."[36] Whitefield himself upset the religious establishment in America. Steven Waldman wrote that "Whitefield was brutal in his criticism of the Church of England and its colonial outposts. He challenged their pettiness, stodginess, and lethargy about moral evils....what started as enmity toward the connection between a particular church and a particular state led naturally to a reassessment of the traditional assumption that church and state must be connected."[37] Such preaching helped lay the foundation for eventual separation from England. Historian Thomas S. Kidd wrote that "Whitefield had revived evangelical faith in America, and by definition, reviving Protestantism meant reviving liberty."[38] McDougall noted: "By the 1760s, evangelical Protestantism imbued British corruption with political as well as spiritual meaning, providing Americans with a second ready-made vocabulary in which to express their outrage."[39]

As an emissary from America to Britain, Franklin saw English religious corruption firsthand in the 1760s and early 1770s. In 1772, Franklin wrote a London newspaper: "If we look back into history for the character of present sects in Christianity, we shall find few that have not in their turns been persecutors, and complainers of persecution. The primitive Christians thought persecution extremely wrong in the Pagans, but practised it on one another. The first Protestants of the Church of England, blamed persecution in the Roman church, but practised it against the Puritans: these found it wrong in the Bishops, but fell into the same practice themselves both here and in New

England. To account for this we should remember, that the doctrine of toleration was not then known, or had not prevailed in the world. Persecution was therefore not so much the fault of the sect as of the times. It was not in those days deemed wrong in itself. The general opinion was only, that those who are in error ought not to persecute the truth: But the possessors of truth were in the right to persecute error, in order to destroy it. Thus every sect believing itself possessed of all truth, and that every tenet differing from theirs was error, conceived that when the power was in their hands, persecution was a duty required of them by that God whom they supposed to be offended with heresy. By degrees more moderate and more modest sentiments have taken place in the Christian world; and among Protestants particularly all disclaim persecution, none vindicate it, and few practise it. We should then cease to reproach each other with what was done by our ancestors, but judge of the present character of sects or churches by their present conduct only."[40]

Franklin's skepticism extended to religious leaders in America and governmental financing of them. In a letter to his Congregationalist sister Jane Mecom in 1743, Franklin had written: "There are some things in your New England doctrine and worship which I do not agree with; but I do not therefore condemn them, or desire to shake your belief or practice of them."[41] In 1780, Franklin wrote a friend: "I am fully of your Opinion respecting religious Tests; but, tho' the People of Massachusetts have not in their new Constitution kept quite clear of them, yet, if we consider what that People were 100 Years ago, we must allow they have gone great Lengths in Liberality of Sentiment on religious Subjects; and we may hope for greater Degrees of Perfection, when their Constitution, some years hence, shall be revised. If Christian Preachers had continued to teach as Christ and his Apostles did, without Salaries, and as the Quakers now do, I imagine Tests would never have existed; for I think they were invented, not so much to secure Religion itself, as the Emoluments of it. When a Religion is good, I conceive that it will support itself; and, when it cannot support itself, and God does not take care to support, so that its Professors are oblig'd to call for the help of the Civil Power, it is a sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one. But I shall be out of my Depth, if I wade any deeper in Theology."[42]

Over time Franklin himself became more catholic in his approach to religion. John Adams, who was somewhat jealous of Franklin's popularity, sarcastically observed: "That Catholics thought him almost a Catholic. The Church of England claimed him as one of them. The Presbyterians thought him half a Presbyterian, and the Friends believed him a wet Quaker.'" Historian Alf Mapp noted: "Adams's comment probably contains some truth, even though his statement was colored by his resentment of the Pennsylvanian."[43] Franklin biographer Stacy Schiff wrote that Franklin "was held in high esteem by the Catholics, by the Church of England, by every religious denomination, each of whom happily claimed him as one of their own; a monochromatic blur amid the brilliant plumage of Paris, he was so commonly taken for a Quaker...A satiric paper ultimately concluded that Franklin owed much of this mileage to the fact that he had no religion at all, which in a churchgoing sense was exact. (He had lasted five Sundays as a Presbyterian.) That may have made it easier for him to swallow what was for ma[n]y of his countrymen the bitter pill of cozying up to a Catholic country [France]."[44] Certainly, it easier for Franklin to deal with the French during the 1783 peace negotiations in Paris than it was for the anti-Catholic John Jay or the anti-clerical John Adams, both of whom were also American peace commissioners.

Catholics

Franklin certainly had his prejudices, but he was not anti-Catholic. At the time of the Revolution, the major center of Catholicism was Maryland. John Carroll of Carrollton was the lone Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence; his cousin became the first Catholic bishop in America. As the American representative in Paris in 1784, Franklin recorded in his diary: "The Pope's Nuncio called, and acquainted me that the Pope had, on my recommendation, appointed Mr. John Carroll, superior of the Catholic clergy in America, with many of the powers of a bishop; and that probably he would be made a bishop in partibus before the end of the year. He asked me which would be most convenient for him, to come to France, or go to St. Domingo, for ordination by another bishop, which was necessary. I mentioned Quebec as more convenient than either. He asked whether, as that was an English province, our government might not take offence at his going thither? I thought not, unless the ordination by that bishop should give him some authority over our bishop. He said, not in the least; that when our bishop was once ordained, he would be independent of the others, and even of the Pope; which I did not clearly understand. He said the Congregation de Propagandá Fide had agreed to receive, and maintain and instruct, two young Americans in the languages and sciences at Rome; (he had formerly told me that more would be educated gratis in France). He added, they had written from American that they are twenty priests, but that they are not sufficient; as the new settlements near the Mississippi have need of some." Franklin recalled:

> The Nuncio said we should find, that the Catholics were not so intolerant as they had been represented; that the Inquisition in Rome had not now so much power as that in Spain; and that in Spain it was used chiefly as a prison of the state. That the Congregation would have undertaken the education of more American youths, and may hereafter, but that at present they are overburdened, having some from all parts of the world. He spoke lightly of their New Bostonian convert Thayer's conversion; that he had advised him not to go to America, but settle in France. That he wanted to convert his countrymen; but he knew nothing yet of his new religion, &c. [45]

Father Carroll had been born and raised in Maryland. He left America for Rome until the dissolution of the Jesuits forced his return to America, from where he petitioned the pope to appoint a bishop for American Catholics. Congress had rebuffed a petition from the Vatican to appoint an American legate to Rome so Rev. Carroll was appointed to assume responsibility for the American Catholic church. When he continued to push for an American bishop, Father Carroll himself was officially named to the post. "Thanks to Carroll's sensitivity to American opinion, compliance with civil law, and respect for lay vestries, the Catholic Church quietly flourished, not least in the nation's capital. A friendly Protestant donated the plot in Georgetown on which the first Catholic college arose," wrote Walter A. McDougall."[46] Historian Gordon S. Wood wrote: "In the 1780s Carroll had worked to make the Catholic Church an 'independent national church' rather than simply a Catholic mission dependent on the Vatican. He argued that the American Revolution had given Catholics 'equal rights and privileges with that of other Christians' and that Catholicism deserved to be independent of 'all foreign jurisdiction.' Carroll established a Catholic college in Georgetown, created a Sulpician seminary in Baltimore, promoted the use of English in the liturgy, and urged the publication of an English translation of the Catholic version of the Bible, which the Irish-born immigrant and devout Catholic publisher Mathew Carey undertook in 1790."[47]

The British had passed the Quebec Act of 1774 following the Treaty of Paris of 1763 that ended the French and Indian War in America and the Seven Years War in Europe. The Quebec Act guaranteed freedom of worship to Catholic French Canada; it appalled Protestants colonists. Thomas S. Kidd wrote that "many American Protestants" fear "that Britain would take away their religious liberty and replace their churches with new Anglican state establishments or, worse, the kind of Catholic rule that Britain had experience in earlier centuries." He noted that young Alexander Hamilton claimed that the act provided the foundation for "arbitrary power, and its great engine the Popish religion" in Quebec.[48] Founding biographer Richard Brookhiser wrote: "Britain's policy of supporting Catholicism had alarmed Protestants throughout the Thirteen Colonies, and the provincial [New York] congress condemned the 'establishment of Popery along the interior confines of the old Protestant Colonies.'" One New Yorker who disagreed was Gouverneur Morris, a religious skeptic whose lack of dogmatism extended to Catholicism, which he did not like but tolerated, writing "that matters of conscience and faith, whether political or religious, are as much out of the province, as they are beyond the ken of human legislatures."[49] Morris wrote John Jay to protest against the offending comments about "Popery," saying "that I had no hand in that foolish religious Business [which] I opposed untill I was weary."[50] Anti-Anglican prejudice was related to anti-Catholic bias. Steven Waldman noted: "Part of the hatred of the Church of England - both when the Puritans were still in England and in the century since they had emigrated - stemmed from the belief that it too closely resembled the Catholic Church."[51] Prejudice against the appointment of bishops from Europe extended to both Anglican and Roman Catholic churches as a potential source of intervention in American government. And, that prejudice extended from Congregationalists in New England to Anglicans in Virginia, where "the gentry liked to keep clergy on leading strings," wrote historian Francis Jennings. "With their record of support for government (which was natural enough for an established church), the Anglican clergy antagonized dissenters on political grounds even more strongly than in matters of creed," wrote Jennings. "Long after the triumph of the Revolution, John Adams would remember that 'the apprehension of Episcopacy contributed...as much as any other cause, to arouse the attention not only of the inquiring mind, but of the common people, and urge them to close thinking on the constitutional authority of parliament over the colonies."[52]

In March 1790, President George Washington addressed a letter to Roman Catholic Americans: "As mankind become more liberal they will be more apt to allow that all those who conduct themselves as worthy members of the community are equally entitled to the protection of civil government. I hope ever to see America among the foremost nations in examples of justice and liberality. And I presume that your fellow-citizens will not forget the patriotic part which you took in the accomplishment of their Revolution, and the establishment of their government; or the important assistance which they received from a nation in which the Roman Catholic faith is professed." I thank you, gentlemen, for your kind concern for me. While my life and my health shall continue, in whatever situation I may be, it shall be my constant endeavor to justify the favorable sentiments which you are pleased to express of my conduct. And may the members of your society in America, animated alone by the pure spirit of Christianity, and still conducting themselves as the faithful subjects of our free government, enjoy every temporal and spiritual felicity.[53]

A very different attitude toward the Catholic church was represented by New York attorney John Jay. Historian Thomas Kidd noted: "In 1778, with enormous irony, anti-Catholic American Patriots entered into an alliance with Catholic France."[54] Jay, a descendant of French Huguenots who became an Anglican, had explicitly anti-Catholic ideas. But when Jay had proposed in 1777 to the New York State Constitutional Convention limits on Catholic citizenship, Jay was confronted by his usual ally, Gouverneur Morris who instead proposed that the constitution declare: "The liberty of conscience hereby granted, shall not be so construed as to excuse acts of licentiousness, or justify practices inconsistent with the peace or safety of this State."[55] Morris won. In the early 1780s, Jay served first as an American diplomat in Catholic Spain where his experiences were uniformly unpleasant. Late, he went to Paris to conclude the war with Britain. French officials there complained that he was prejudiced against the French and Catholics. One official in New York wrote back to the French government that Jay "is the only man from the State of New York, who is opposed to tolerance of the Catholic religion, saying that the lands cleared by his ancestors would never be used to nourish those who chased from their homeland."[56] Jay did not appreciate religious scoffers any more than he liked Catholics. As an American diplomat in France, Jay often attended Benjamin Franklin's home, where French deists also frequented. Biographer Frank Monaghan noted that one night, a French visitor "laughed at the idea of the divinity of Jesus. Jay glared but said nothing, arose, turned on his heel and walked away. At another time a physician attending Jay began to scoff at the belief in a resurrection. Jay at once stopped him: 'Sir, I pay you for your medical knowledge, and not for your distorted views of the Christian religion!'"[57]

John Adams

Like John Jay, Adams was anti-Catholic, but less overtly. After attending a Catholic mass at Philadelphia in 1774, Adams described the church and service in a detailed letter to his wife, concluding, "Here is every Thing which can lay hold of the Eye, Ear and Imagination. Every Thing which can charm and bewitch the simple and ignorant. I wonder how Luther ever broke the spell."[58] Adams could be cranky and he also objected to the role of clergy in political affairs. Adams complained about the arrival of the Rev. John Zubly as a Georgia delegate, writing that Dr. Zubly "is the first Gentleman of the Cloth who has appeared in Congress, I can not but wish he may be the last. Mixing the sacred Character, with that of the Statesman, as it is quite unnecessary at this time of day, in these Colonies is not attended with any good Effects. The Clergy are universally too little acquainted with the World, and the Modes of Business, to engage in civil affairs with any Advantage."[59] Despite Adams' observations, clergy took an important role in the American Revolution. An important New Jersey delegate to the Continental Congress was Dr. John Witherspoon, a prominent Presbyterian clergyman who was president of the forerunner of Princeton College.

As he grew older, Adams became increasingly judgmental in private - about Christians and Christian denominations. He wrote Thomas Jefferson in 1816: "We have now, it seems a National Bible Society, to propagate King James's Bible, through all Nations. Would it not be better, to apply these pious Subscriptions, to purify Christendom from the Corruptions of Christianity; than to propagate those Corruptions in Europe Asia, Africa and America!"[60] Adams' ambivalence towards religion was reflected in an 1817 letter to Jefferson: "Twenty times, in the course of my late reading, have I been upon the point of breaking out, 'This would be the best of all possible Worlds, if there were no Religion in it!!!!...Without Religion, this World would be Something not fit to be mentioned in polite company, I mean Hell."[61]

Jefferson's religion - or lack of it - became a major issue in the 1800 presidential election against Adams, the one-term Federalist incumbent. Numerous political pamphlets attacked Jefferson's supposed atheism. Jefferson declined to respond to these critics - and to further expose his unorthodox religious views. Jefferson biographer Fawn M. Brodie wrote: "In dodging Benjamin Rush's appeal for 'a letter on Christianity,' Jefferson wrote, tactfully, at first, that he had no time, and that it would do no good. What he was finally moved to write, however, was that he would never court the clergy by offers of compromise. The Episcopalian and Congregationalist churches in particular, he noted, still hoped to be named as the established church of the United States. Each church knew that his success in the election 'threatens abortion to their hopes.' Then he went on, with that elegant and eloquent fierceness that bursts forth so rarely in his letters, to write one of the most famous of all his lines: 'And they believe rightly: for I have sworn upon the altar of God, eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man.'"[62]

John Adams' views on religion were actually similar to Jefferson's, but Adams was more tolerant of other religions even when he disagreed with them. Adams wrote in 1820 at age 85: "I must be a very unnatural son to entertain any prejudices against the Calvinists, or Calvinism, according to your confession of faith; for my father and mother, my uncles and aunts, and all my predecessors, from our common ancestor, who landed in this country two hundred years ago, wanting five months, were of that persuasion. Indeed, I have never known any better people than the Calvinists. Nevertheless, I must acknowledge that I cannot class myself under that denomination."[63] Historian Edwin S. Gaustad noted: "Adams entertained grave suspicion of religious revivalism, awakenings, and enthusiasm. Having grown up in the waning days of New England's first Awakening, he had had his heart and mind filled to overflowing with the religious acrimony of the time."[64]

Like Adams, his wife Abigail was unfriendly to Calvinism and particularly to what she viewed as Calvinist intolerance. "The soil of N England will not cultivate nor cherish clerical biggotry [sic] or intolerance altho, there is a struggle to introduce it." she wrote son John Quincy in 1815. John and Abigail were particular in their theology, and thought Presbyterian sermons too Calvinist for their unitarian leanings. "I must sit under as strong Calvinism as I can possibly swallow," Abigail complained of sermons in Philadelphia.[65] Adams' private religious views could be very pointed. In 1809, Adams wrote: "I will insist that the Hebrews have done more to civilize men than any other nation. If I were an atheist, and believed in blind eternal fate, I should still believe that fate had ordained the Jews to be the most essential instrument for civilizing the nations."[66] As he neared his death, Adams softened somewhat in his religious critiques. Steven Waldman wrote: "The man who once attacked Catholics as villainous, Quakers as troublemakers, and Jeffersonians as infidels wrote to Jefferson in old age that what he now treasured most was 'universal toleration.'"[67]

George Washington

Although anti-Catholic prejudices were common among English colonists, they were not tolerated by Virginia's George Washington, the commander of America's Continental Army. Steven Waldman wrote that General Washington "believed that unless he could neutralize Canada, he couldn't protect New England and New York from British invasions from the north."[68] When in 1775 General Washington heard that some soldiers were preparing a Guy Hawkes Day celebration to mock Catholicism and the Pope, Washington angrily issued a statement: "As the Commander in Chief has been apprized of a design form'd for the observance of that ridiculous and childish custom of burning the Effigy of the pope - He cannot help expressing his surprise that there should be Officers and Soldiers in this army so void of common sense, as not to see the impropriety of such a step at this Juncture; at a Time when we are solliciting, and have really obtain'd the friendship and alliance of the people of Canada."[69]

Over two decades, religious tolerance had no more fervent proponent in America than George Washington. Religious bigotry was bad politics, and Washington was a good politician who understood the need to knit together the disparate strands of the 13 colonies in new nation. In a letter to George Mason in 1785, Washington wrote that "no man's sentiment are more opposed to any kind of restraint upon religious principles than mine are."[70] Washington believed in religious freedom more than he believed in religion. "Without giving bigotry any sanctions, Washington sought to borrow what was useful in Christianity for the United States," wrote biographer Richard Brookhiser.[71] In orders to Benedict Arnold embarking on an invasion of Canada in 1775, General Washington warned against any agitation against Catholic residents of the Quebec area: "I also it in charge to you to avoid all disrespect to or contempt of the religion of the country and its ceremonies. Prudence, policy and a true Christian spirit, will lead us to look with compassion upon their errors without insulting them."[72] President Washington wrote Irish legislator Edward Newenham in 1792: "I regret exceedingly that the disputes between the Protestants and Roman Catholics should be carried to the serious alarming height mentioned in your letters. Religious controversies are always productive of more acrimony and irreconcilable hatreds than those which spring from any other cause; and I was not without hopes that the enlightened and liberal policy of the present age would have put an effectual stop to contentions of this kind."[73] A Presbyterian minister who served with Washington in the Continental Army declared: "He was truly of a catholic faith, and considered the distinction of the great denominations of Christians rather as shades of difference, than anything substantial or essential to salvation."[74]

In August 1776, General Washington had issued orders regarding sabbath services: "That the Troops may have an opportunity of attending public worship, as well as take some rest after the great fatigue they have gone through; The General in future excuses them from fatigue duty on Sundays (except at the Ship Yards, or special occasions) until further orders. The General is sorry to be informed that the foolish, and wicked practice, of profane cursing and swearing (a Vice heretofore little known in an American Army) is growing into fashion; he hopes the officers will, by example, as well as influence, endeavour to check it, and that both they, and the men will reflect, that we can have little hopes of the blessing of Heaven on our Arms, if we insult it by our impiety, and folly; added to this, it is a vice so mean and low, without any temptation, that every man of sense, and character, detests and despises it."

Washington's own lack of attachment to religious dogma made him more flexible in dealing with different religious denominations. Washington wrote in 1787: "Being no bigot myself to any mode of worship, I am disposed to indulge the professors of Christianity in the church, that road to Heaven, which to them shall seem the most direct plainest easiest and least liable to exception."[75] In May 1789, President Washington wrote to the General Committee of the United Baptist Churches: "If I could have entertained the slightest apprehension that the Constitution framed in the Convention, where I had the honor to preside, might possibly endanger the religious rights of any ecclesiastical society, certainly I would never have placed my signature to it; and if I could now conceive that the general government might ever be so administered as to render the liberty of conscience insecure, I beg you will be persuaded that no one would be more zealous than myself to establish effectual barriers against the horrors of spiritual tyranny, and every species of religious persecution. For you, doubtless, remember that I have often expressed my sentiment, that every man, conducting himself as a good citizen, and being accountable to God alone for his religious opinions, ought to be protected in worshipping the Deity according to the dictates of his own conscience."[76]

Washington's personal example and public statements were important signals of national tolerance. Washington's personal tolerance may have been more important to the American tradition of tolerance than the more intellectual tolerance of colleagues like Thomas Jefferson or John Adams, both of whom personally disdained many religious traditions. Historian Paul F. Boller, Jr., wrote: "Both as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army and as President, he used his immense prestige and influence to encourage mutual tolerance and good will among American Protestants, Catholics, and Jews and to create a climate of opinion in which every citizen shall, as he phrased it, 'sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree and there shall be none to make him afraid.'"[77] Historian Mary V. Thompson concluded that "Washington promoted a national atmosphere in which all were free to express their faith."[78]

Washington was notably catholic in his religious devotions. Washington attended services with Anglican Presbyterians, Catholics, Quakers, Congregationalists, Lutherans, and Dutch Reformed churches.[79] After attending a Dutch Reformed church in Pennsylvania, President Washington noted that the service, "being in the language not a word of which I understood, I was in no danger of becoming a proselyte to its religion by the eloquence of the Preacher."[80] Jon Meacham noted: "Washington's expansive view of liberty...extended to those Christians who felt shut out of the mainstream."[81] Noted historian Gordon Wood: "Washington, unlike Jefferson, had no deep dislike of organized religion or of the clergy as long as they contributed to civic life."[82]

As commander of the Continental army, General Washington wanted no barrier to the appointment of chaplains. "The foundation of our Empire was not laid in the gloomy age of Ignorance and Superstition, but at an Epocha when the rights of Mankind were better understood and more clearly defined, than at any former period, the researches of the human mind than at any former period, the researches of the human mind after social happiness have been carried to a great extent, the Treasures of knowledge, acquired by the labours of Philosophers, Sages, and Legislators, through a long succession [of] years, are laid open for our use, and their collected wisdom may be happily applied in the Establishment of our Forms of Government, the free cultivation of Letters, the unbounded extension of Commerce, the progressive refinement of Manners, the growing liberality of sentiment, and above all, the pure and benign light of Revelation, have had a meliorating influence on Mankind and increased the blessings of Society; At this auspicious period, the United States came into existence as a Nation, and if their Citizens should not be compleatly Free and Happy, the fa[u]lt will be entirely their own." In this circular letter to the nation's governors in June 1983, Washington wrote:

> "I now make it my earnest prayer, that God would have you and the State over which you preside, in his holy protection, that he would incline the hearts of the Citizens to cultivate a spirit of subordination and obedience to Government - to entertain a brotherly affection and love for one another, for their fellow Citizens of the United States at large, and particularly for their Brethren who have served in the Field, and finally, that he would most graciously be pleased to dispose us all, to do Justice, to love Mercy, and to demean ourselves with that Charity, Humility, and Pacific temper of mind which were the Characteristicks of the Divine Author of our blessed Religion, and without an humble imitation of whose example in these things, we can never hope to be a Happy Nation."[83]

In 1789, President Washington wrote a Jewish congregation in Georgia: "May the same wonder-working Deity, who long since delivered the Hebrews from their Egyptian oppressors, planted them in a promised land, whose providential agency has lately been conspicuous in establishing these United States as an independent nation, still continue to water them with the dews of heaven and make the inhabitants of every denomination participate in the temporal and spiritual blessings of that people whose God is Jehovah."[84] A year later, President Washington wrote a Jewish delegation from Rhode Island: "The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support."

> It would be inconsistent with the frankness of my character not to avow that I am pleased with your favorable opinion of my Administration, and fervent wishes for my felicity. May the Children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other Inhabitants; while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and figtree, and there shall be none to make him afraid. May the father of all mercies scatter light and not darkness in our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in his own due time and way everlastingly happy."[85]

Also in 1789, newly-inaugurated President Washington wrote Virginia Baptists: "I have often expressed my sentiments, that every man, conducting himself as a good citizen, and being accountable to God alone for his religious opinions, ought to be protected in worshipping the Deity according to the dictates of his own conscience."[86] He wrote Methodist bishops who congratulated him: "After mentioning that I trust the people of every denomination, who demean themselves as good citizens, you will have occasion to be convinced that I shall always strive to prove a faithful and impartial Patron of genuine, vital religion; I must assure you in particular that I take in the kindest part the promise you make of presenting your prayers at the Throne of Grace for me, and that I likewise implore the divine benedictions on yourselves and your religious community."[87]

Replying to a communication from a Presbyterian group in 1789, President Washington wrote: "While I reiterate the possession of my dependence upon Heaven as the source of all public and private blessings; I will observe that the general prevalence of piety, philanthropy, honesty, industry and œconomy seems, in the ordinary course of human affairs are particularly necessary for advancing and confirming the happiness of our country. While all men within our territories are protected in worshipping the Deity according to the dictates of their consciences; it is rationally to be expected from them in return, that they will be emulous of evincing the sincerity of their profession by the innocence of their lives, and the beneficence of their actions: For no man, who is profligate in his morals, or a bad member of the civil community, can possibly be a true Christian, or a credit to his own religious society."[88]

In response to a Philadelphia delegation of Quakers visiting him in New York in 1789 to discuss their pacificist principles, President Washington said: "The liberty enjoyed by the People of these States of worshipping Almighty God agreeable to their consciences is not only among the choicest of their blessings, but also of their rights. While men perform their social duties faithfully, they do all that Society or the State can with propriety demand or expect and remain responsible only to their Maker for the religion or mode of faith which they may prefer or profess. Your principles and conduct are well known to me, and it is doing the People called Quakers no more than justice to say, that (except their declining to share with others the burthen of the common defence) there is no denomination among us, who are more exemplary and useful citizens."[89] Privately, however, Washington seethed at the Quakers when they led efforts in 1790 to petition Congress to abolish slavery. In 1786 Washington wrote Pennsylvania financier Robert Morris about the actions of earlier Quaker abolitionists:

> "I give you the trouble of this letter at the instance of Mr. Dalby of Alexandria; who is called to Philadelphia to attend what he conceives to be a vexatious lawsuit respecting a slave of his, which a Society of Quakers in the city (formed for such purposes) have attempted to liberate; the merits of this case will no doubt appear upon trial, but from Mr. Dalby's state of the matter, it should seem that this Society is not only acting repugnant to justice so far as its conduct concerns strangers, but, in my opinion extremely impolitickly with respect to the State, the City in particular; and without being able, (but by acts of tyranny and oppression) to accomplish their own ends. He says the conduct of this society is not sanctioned by Law: had the case been otherwise, whatever my opinion of the Law might have been, my respect for the policy of the State would on this occasion had appeared in my silence; because against the penalties of promulgated Laws one may guard; but there is no avoiding the snares of individuals, or of private societies. And if the practice of this Society of which Mr. Dalby speaks, is not discountenanced, none of those whose misfortune it is to have slaves as attendants, will visit the City if they can possibly avoid it; because by so doing they hazard their property; or they must be at the expence (and this will not always succeed) of providing servants of another description for the trip.[90]

President Washington continued to preach religious tolerance. In 1793, President Washington wrote the members of a Baltimore church: "We have abundant reason to rejoice that in this Land the light of truth and reason has triumphed over the power of bigotry and superstition, and that every person may here worship God according to the dictates of his own heart. In the enlightened Age and in this Land of equal liberty it is our boast, that a man's religious tenets will not forfeit the protection of the Laws, nor deprive him of the right of attaining and holding the highest Offices that are known in the United States."[91] Historian Paul Boller noted: "If Washington said little about religious liberty during the war, he had much to say publicly and of an explicit nature on the subject after he became president. In each case what he said grew out of some point raised in a formal address to him."[92] His example undoubtedly set as strong a precedent for religious tolerance as did Madison's Bill of Rights.

Just as Washington embraced religious tolerance, so did a wide spectrum of religious groups in America embrace him, noted historian Barry Schwartz: "The Baptists...were delighted when the nation's hero urged them to be persuaded that 'no one would be more zealous than myself to establish effectual barriers against the horrors of spiritual tyranny, and every species of religious persecution.' The Quakers rejoiced to know that the new President considered them 'exemplary and useful citizens,' despite their refusal to aid him in war. Catholics, who were in many respects the most despised of the religious minorities, saw an end to persecution when the chief magistrate assured them that all citizens 'are equally entitled to the protection of civil government....And I presume that your fellow-citizens will not forget the patriotic part which you took in the accomplishment of the revolution, and the establishment of their government.' Jews found in Washington's policy an unprecedented expression of friendship from a head of state...The Universalists disdained by the pious for their liberal religious vies, were congratulated by Washington for their 'political professions and practices,' which were 'almost universally friendly to the order and happiness of our civil institutions.'"[93] Sagely, Washington recognized that if Americans were to embrace their new nationality, then they could not be divided by religious bigotry or conflicts.

Thomas Jefferson

George Washington's religious tolerance sprang from his dedication to the civic virtue of religion. Thomas Jefferson's public tolerance was privately more critical of theological beliefs and practices of which he disapproved personally but tolerated politically. Jefferson's leadership on religious toleration in Virginia, however, helped inform Washington's position. Paul Boller maintained that "Washington's association with Jefferson had something to do with his clear-cut pronouncements on religious liberty during his Presidency. Intolerance in any form - religious or secular - was as foreign to Washington's mind as it was to Jefferson's."[94] Jefferson came to his positions, however, from a different intellectual framework. Jefferson biographer Willard Sterne Randall wrote: "To Jefferson, religion was a private matter, like marriage, and in 1776, he said little about his private views on the subject. He did not attend church frequently, eschewed religious dogma, and believed in a supreme being who had set the world on its foundation and stepped aside. But he respected all honest men and their moral beliefs and believed firmly in tolerating all religions, not only Anglicanism or Christianity."[95] In an 1813 letter to Richard Rush, Jefferson wrote: "Religion is a subject on which I have ever been most scrupulously reserved. I have considered it as a matter between every man and his Maker, in which no other, and far less the public had a right to intermeddle..."84 In an 1814 letter, Jefferson wrote: "Our particular principles of religion are a subject of accountability to our god alone. I enquire after no man's and trouble none with mine; nor is it given to us in this life to know whether yours or mine, our friend's or our foe's, are exactly the right."[85] In 1821, Jefferson wrote former Secretary of State Timothy Pickering: "As the Creator has made no two faces alike, so no two minds, and probably no two creeds."[96]

Somewhat paradoxically, Jefferson was a leader in public religious tolerance - even while he privately disdained the practices of many religions and religious leaders. Historian Eugene R. Sheridan wrote: "Jefferson's early rejection of traditional Christian doctrine and adoption of natural religion left him with a lifelong belief in the need for freedom of thought and the primacy of morality over dogma in religious affairs. Each person, he decided, had a natural right to worship - or not to worship - God as he pleased."[97] Jefferson biographer Dumas Malone wrote: "Jefferson's philosophy was pluralistic: he regarded a multiplicity of sects as desirable, seeing safety against tyranny in numbers. Since he attacked no sect on religious grounds, no one could rightly charge him with being personally antireligious. He had long been a generous contributor to churches, and he made a special point of attending divine services while President."[98] But just because Jefferson believed in a church's right to exist did not mean he respected the church, its beliefs and its clergy. Jefferson's believed that less rational religious beliefs than his own would ultimately wither away. Historian Charles B. Stanford wrote that "it is often overlooked that Jefferson based his argument for human rights upon his religious beliefs about the nature of God and man. All men had rights that were endowed in their very humanity by their Creator. For Jefferson, this was a 'self-evident' truth upon which all other arguments depended."[99] Jefferson was unorthodox in his own beliefs so he fervently believed in the protection of unorthodox views. Merrill D. Peterson wrote that Jefferson "wished for himself, for all his countrymen, not freedom from religion but freedom to pursue religion wherever reason and conscience led."[100] Steven Waldman wrote: "Jefferson believed that a secret to religious freedom was destroying the concept of heresy, the crime of expressing unauthorized religious thought. And he cared deeply - personally, passionately - about heresy because, in the contest of his times, Thomas Jefferson was a heretic, and wanted to live in a nation that tolerated men like him."[101]

Jefferson was strongly opposed to an "established"religion and determined to write his ideas into law. Historian Merrill D. Peterson wrote: "Jefferson became an outright champion of this cause in 1776. Prior to independence he had followed with concern the developments in the religious life of Virginia and unquestionably given a good deal of thought and study to the relationship between civil and ecclesiastical authority....As usual with him, history proved a convenient handmaid of his convictions."[102] The 1776 Virginia Declaration of Rights, which George Mason drafted, stated that no Virginian should "be compelled to frequent or maintain any religious institution."[103] In 1777 Jefferson drafted a Bill for Religious Freedom. Biographer Alf J. Mapp, Jr. observed that Jefferson manipulated his critics by using religious language to frame his arguments: "Jefferson...knew that to advocate religious freedom in a society accustomed to the partnership of church and state was to invite charges of impiety. He therefore included in the Statute a reminder that 'Almighty God had created the mind free; that all attempts to influence it by temporal punishment or burthens, or by civil incapacitations, tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy and meanness, and are a departure from the plan of the Holy author of our religion, who being Lord both of body and mind, yet chose not to propagate it by coercions on either, as was his Almighty power to do.' He attacked "the impious presumption of legislators and rules, civil as well as ecclesiastical, who, being themselves but fallible and uninspired men have assumed dominion over the faith of others, setting up their own opinions and modes of thinking as the only true and infallible, and as such endeavoring to impose them on others."[104] It was one of his most cherished ideas. His efforts were powerfully supported by George Mason and James Madison. Petitions rained in on the Legislature to support religious freedom. "The apprehension of the old landed aristocracy, devoted to the existing social system, grew in proportion as these petitions, passionately demanding radical action, poured in."[105] Eventually, noted historian Merrill D. Peterson wrote: "The fame of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom rapidly spread beyond American shores. No other act of legislation so pointedly enforced the reality of the American revolution on the enlightened heads of Europe."[106]

Jefferson's convictions on religious tolerance ran deep and strong. Historian Charles B. Stanford wrote that "Jefferson regarded religious freedom as the most important of the rights of man. In the first place, religious freedom involved more than the government or even the church. It involved God and the human conscience."[107] Norman Cousins wrote: "His case was that religion was being stifled by religion itself; that a state that identifies itself with one denomination makes it difficult or impossible for other denominations to exist. Religion had to be protected not so much against the irreligious as against government itself, acting in the name of religion."[108] In his Notes on the State of Virginia, Jefferson wrote: "Was the government to prescribe to us our medicine and diet, our bodies would be in such keeping as our souls are now."[109] Jefferson observed:

> "Millions of innocent men, women and children, since the introduction of Christianity, have been burnt, tortured, fined, imprisoned: yet we have not advanced one inch toward uniformity. What has been the effect of coercion? To make one half the world fools, and the other half hypocrites. To support roguery and error all over the earth."
>
> The rights of conscience we never submitted, we could not submit. We are answerable for them to our God. The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts as are injurious to others. But it does me no injury for my neighbour to say there are twenty gods, or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg....Reason and free inquiry are the only effectual agents against error."[110]

Religious toleration was fundamental for Jefferson, but such tolerance was an acquired trait for most Americans. Historian Charles B. Stanford wrote that Jefferson "repeatedly stated that it was essential to practice religious toleration in society since people would inevitably differ in their religious beliefs just as they differed in tastes, talents and appearances. It was 'absurd,' he declared, for some people to tell the Almighty he should make all people think or look alike."[111] As President in 1802, Jefferson wrote an important letter to the Danbury (Connecticut) Baptist Association in response to their request for a national day of fasting, although he never addressed the subject of their address. What he did was to introduce into American polity the notion of "a wall of separation between Church & state." Historian Gordon S. Wood wrote: "It is unlikely that Jefferson had in mind the kind of high and often impenetrable wall between church and state that modern jurists have maintained. It is more likely that he had an exclusively political object."[112] Jefferson wrote: "Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should "make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," thus building a wall of separation between Church & State. Adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties."[113]

In practice, Jefferson's wall of separation was not as high as he proclaimed. Historian Gordon S. Wood wrote that Jefferson "knew very well what effect he as president would have when in January 1802 he attended a church service held in the chamber of the House of Representatives. His attendance attracted wide public notice and astonished the Federalists. Even though other churches were available, Jefferson continued to attend church services in the House chamber and made available executive buildings for church functions."[114] In his Second Inaugural Address in 1805, Jefferson stated: "In matters of religion, I have considered that its free exercise is placed by the constitution independent of the powers of the general government. I have therefore undertaken, on no occasion, to prescribe the religious exercises suited to it; but have left them, as the constitution found them, under the direction and discipline of state or church authorities acknowledged by the several religious authorities."

Privately, some Founders were much more critical of religions and denominations with whom they differed. Presbyterians, according to Jefferson were "the loudest, the most intolerant of all sects, the most tyrannical, and ambitious..."[116] Adams was skeptical of religious orthodoxy and more worried about religious enthusiasm. He wrote Jefferson in 1817 in a panic about religious zealotry: "Oh! Lord! Do you think a Protestant Popedom is annihilated in America? Do you recollect, or have you ever attended to the ecclesiastical Strifes in Maryland Pennsylvania, New York, and every part of New England? What a mercy it is that these People cannot whip and crop, and pillory and roast, as yet in the U.S.! If they could they would."

> Do you know that The General of the Jesuits and consequently all his Hosts have their Eyes on this Country? Do you know that the Church of England is employing more means and more Art, to propagate their demipopery among Us, than ever? Quakers, Anabaptists, Moravians, Swedenborgians, Methodists, Unitarians, Nothingarians in all Europe are employing [underhand] means to propagate their sectarian Systems in these States. The multitude and diversity of them, You will say, is our Security against them all. God grant it. But if We consider that the Presbyterians and Methodists are far more numerous and the most likely to unite; let a George Whitefield arise, with a military cast, like Mahomet, or Loyola, and what will become of all the other Sects who can never unite?"[117]

Jefferson, Madison, Reason and Tolerance

Along with his friend and neighbor James Madison, Jefferson worshiped at the temple of reason. They both were skeptical about the role of any state-sponsored church. Historian Edwin S. Gaustad wrote: "Jefferson and Madison came to understand much of western European history as needlessly besmirched and tragically bloodied by the heavy hand of despotic religion. So also in Virginia, Jefferson found the Church of England much too privileged and protected, with the virtually automatic result that it became pompous, persecutorial, and far more involved in political than in spiritual concerns. Madison, at the tender age of twenty-two, already found himself out of patience with neighboring Anglicans who indulged in that 'diabolical, hell-conceived principle of persecution."[118]

In *his Autobiography*, Jefferson outlined the religious history of his home state: "The first settlers in this country were emigrants from England, of the English church, just at a point of time when it was flushed with complete victory over the religious of all other persuasions. Possessed, as they became, of the powers of making, administering, and executing the laws, they shewed equal intolerance in this country with their Presbyterian brethren, who had emigrated to the northern government. The poor Quakers were flying from persecution in England. They cast their eyes on these new countries as asylums of civil and religious freedom; but they found them free only for the reigning sect. Several acts of the Virginia assembly of 1659, 1662, and 1693, had made it penal in parents to refuse to have their children baptized; had prohibited the unlawful assembling of Quakers; had made it penal for any master of a vessel to bring a Quaker into the state; had ordered those already here, and such as should come thereafter, to be imprisoned till they should abjure the country; provided a milder punishment for their first and second return, but death for their third; had inhibited all persons from suffering their meetings in or near their houses, entertaining them individually, or disposing of books which supported their tenets. If no capital execution took place here, as did in New-England, it was not owing to the moderation of the church, or spirit of the legislature, as may be inferred from the law itself; but to historical circumstances which have not been handed down to us. The Anglicans retained full possession of the country about a century. Other opinions began then to creep in, and the great care of the government to support their own church, having begotten an equal degree of indolence in its clergy, two-thirds of the people had become dissenters at the commencement of the present revolution. The laws indeed were still oppressive on them, but the spirit of the one party had subsided into moderation, and of the other had risen to a degree of determination which commanded respect."[119]

Virginia in the mid-18th Century was not a center of religious tolerance. Historian Andrew Levy wrote: "In the late 1760s and early 1770s, Baptist ministers were whipped, jailed for months at a time, cruelly dunked in mock baptisms. Roughs waited outside their meetinghouses with guns, or with playing cards, either to disrupt the services or to deride them by turning their pulpits into whist tables. At times, the persecutions attained a kind of biblical depth. Live snakes and hornets' nests were thrown into meetings."[120] Dissatisfaction with the dominant Anglican clergy had been growing along with dissenting sects. Historian Gordon S. Wood wrote: "The Virginia gentry blamed the growth of religious dissent on the long-claimed incompetence of the Anglican ministers. In turn the ministers accused the lay vestries, which were composed of Anglican gentry, of not supporting them."[121] The "establishment" of the Anglican church in Virginia led to many problems. Dumas Malone wrote: "Because the pay was poor, the ministers frequently were utterly unfit, both intellectually and spiritually, for their functions. They were noted for their slovenliness in religion and the looseness of their private living."[122]

This period in Virginia coincided with the growth of evangelical churches such as Baptists. Repression by state-supported Anglicans converted many Baptists into proponents of church-state separation. Despite their widely divergent beliefs, Baptists and deists became unlikely allies in the struggle for religious liberty in the state and the effort to decouple the state from the Anglican church. Historian Merrill D. Peterson wrote: "In the liberality of his mind, as in his entire personality and background, Jefferson obviously had more in common with the mild and genial Episcopalians than with the evangelical Baptists and 'New Light' Presbyterians who furnished the battalions for the campaign generaled by Madison and himself."[123] Historian Thomas S. Kidd observed: "The movement for religious liberty would succeed in America because evangelicals, rationalists, and deists fought for it together."[124] It was a strange coalition.

For Jefferson it was a good political issue. Biographer Noble E. Cunningham, Jr., wrote that Jefferson's "interest in religious liberty coincided with a rising popular excitement over that issue in the state. The Virginia Declaration of Rights in June, 1776, had affirmed the principle of religious freedom but had stopped short of disestablishing the Anglican Church."[125] Historian Mary V. Thompson wrote: "Among the teachings of certain Anglican churchmen on the eve of the war were the idea that the Church of England was the only true church; that no one could become a Christian or be ordained to the ministry outside of the Church of England; that marriages could be legitimate only if performed by an Anglican minister; that the English king ruled by divine right; that a believer's duties as a Christian included loyalty to the king and government; that an established national church was essential for every nation; that the continued supremacy of the Church of England and the retention of the American colonies were necessary for the preservation of the empire..."[126] Jefferson would take an active role in overthrowing this system.

After Jefferson recounted the evils of the established church in his autobiography, he noted that "the first republican legislature, which met in '76, was crowded with petitions to abolish this spiritual tyranny. These brought on the severest contests in which I have ever been engaged. Our great opponents were Mr. [Edmund] Pendleton and Robert Carter Nicolas; honest men, but zealous churchmen. The petitions were referred to the committee of the whole house on the state of the country and, after desperate contests in that committee, almost daily from the 11th of October to the 5th of December, we prevailed so far only, as to repeal the laws which rendered criminal the maintenance of any religious opinions, the forbearance of repairing to the church, or the exercise of any mode of worship; and further, to exempt dissenters from contributions to the support of the established church; and to suspend, only until the next session, levies on the members of that church for the salaries of their own incumbents. For although the majority of our citizens were dissenters, as has been observed, a majority of the legislature were [Anglican] churchmen."[127] Jefferson's position was politically risky. Nevertheless, noted Jefferson biographer Dumas Malone: "By championing the cause of freedom he probably gained more friends at home than he lost, for the dissenting sects were grateful."[128] Historian Thomas S. Kidd wrote: "The Great Awakening of the mid-eighteenth century fundamentally challenged the concept of state-supported churches and ministers, with the revivalist revolt bringing into question the spiritual legitimacy of those churches and their pastors."[129]

Malone wrote that Jefferson "was convinced that complete religious freedom should be recognized by human law because of the very nature of religion. The care of every man's soul belongs to himself; no one can prescribe the faith of another..."[130] In the fall of 1776 Jefferson paraphrased John Locke when he wrote: "Each church being free, no one can have jurisdiction over another; no not even when the civil magistrate joins it. It neither acquires the right of the sword by the magistrates coming to it, nor does it lose the rights of instruction or excommunication by his going from it, it cannot by the accession of any new member acquire jurisdiction over those who do no[t] accede. He brings only himself, having no power to bring others."[131]

Under the leadership of George Mason, the Virginia legislature had passed in June 1776 a "Declaration of Rights," the last element of which declared: "That religion, or the duty which we owe to our CREATOR, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence; and therefore, all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience; and that it is the mutual duty of all to practice Christian forbearance, love, and charity towards each other."[132] In Philadelphia where he was a delegate to the Continental Congress, Jefferson himself had been work on his own version back of a human rights declaration "All persons shall have full and free liberty of religious opinion; nor shall any be compelled to frequent or maintain any religious institution...." Virginia's Declaration or Rights foreshadowed the efforts that Jefferson and James Madison undertook to separate the Anglican church from state sponsorship in Virginia. It would be a lengthy fight. Gordon Wood noted: " Although the 1776 Virginia constitution guaranteed the 'free exercise of religion' and the state legislature suspended the collection of religious taxes, the Anglican Church as not actually disestablished in 1776. Many Virginia leaders like Patrick Henry were willing to settle for some sort of multiple establishment, but others led by Jefferson and Madison wanted an end to all forms of state support for religion. They wanted to move beyond John Locke's plea for religious toleration; they wanted religious liberty, a different thing altogether. Consequently, the state legislature remained deadlocked for nearly a decade."[133] Ironically, Henry in 1863 had been the lawyer in an earlier case for a parish challenging a ministers' lawsuit of the Two Penny Act that changing ministers' payment s from tobacco to cash.[134] He also gained a reputation by his defense of Baptist ministers for "Preaching the gospel of the Son of God!"[135]

James Madison

Jefferson neighbor James Madison had his own experience with religious intolerance after his graduation from the then College of New Jersey. Historian Garry Wills wrote: "Madison's views on religious freedom are the inspiration for all that was best in his later political thought." Those views were formed by his experiences at Princeton College where "he observed the great sincerity of religious practice under conditions of freedom. This became a touchstone for him of the blessings of freedom in general." Wills noted that "In his close circle of friends at the school were several who entered, or considered entering, the Presbyterian ministry, and he admired and kept in touch with them for years. They visited his father's plantation and were allowed to preach in the Anglican stronghold of Virginia."[136] Norman Cousins wrote: "At the time of Madison's return from Princeton, several 'well-meaning men,' as he described them, were put in prison for their religious views. Baptists were being fined or imprisoned for holding unauthorized meetings. Dissenters were taxed for the support of the State Church. Preachers had to be licensed. Madison saw at first hand the repetition of the main evils of the Old Country."[137] Steven Waldman wrote: "Madison's sympathy for the Baptists translated into an increasing disgust with the Anglican hierarchy." Madison himself wrote: "If the Church of England had been the established and general religion in all the Northern Colonies as it has been among us here, it is clear to me that slavery and Subjection might and would have been gradually insinuated among us."[138]

In 1776, at age 25, Madison entered the Virginia legislature where he began to work on religious freedom issues. Late in life, Madison recalled: "Being young & in the midst of distinguished and experienced members of the convention he did not enter into its debates; tho' he occasionally suggested amendments; the most material of which was a change of the terms in which the freedom of conscience was expressed in the proposed Declaration of Rights. This important and meritorious instrument was drawn by Geo. Mason, who had inadvertently adopted the word 'toleration' in the article on that subject. The change suggested and accepted, substituted a phraseology which declared the freedom of conscience to be a natural and absolute right."[139] Madison biographer Ralph Ketcham observed: "The change was crucial, however, because it made liberty of conscience a substantive right, the inalienable privilege of all men equally, rather than a dispensation conferred as privilege by established authorities. Madison had made possible complete liberty of belief or unbelief, and the utter separation of church and state."[140] Madison failed, however, in his attempt to disestablish the Episcopal church in Virginia; Madison's original amendment to Mason's language read: "That Religion or the duty we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, being under the direction of reason and conviction only, not of violence or compulsion, all men are equally entitled to the full and free exercise of it accor[din]g to the dictates of Conscience; and there that no man or class of men ought, on account of religion, to be invested with peculiar emoluments or privileges, nor subject to any penalties or disabilities unless &c.." [141]

Like Thomas Jefferson, James Madison had been affronted by the practice and abuse of the established Anglican church in Virginia. Historian Garrett Ward Sheldon wrote: "This seemed a clear case of human sin hiding behind clerical gowns, a corrupt church serving Mammon rather than God. Such 'Religious bondage,' Madison complained, 'shackles and debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprize.' He contrasted this with the regions of America where freedom of religion promoted a lively, honest Christian faith and practice, where the 'public has long felt the good effects of their religious as well as Civil Liberty.' In such areas where true Christianity has flourished, 'Industry and Virtue have been promoted by mutual emulation and mutual inspection' of the different Christian denominations, and 'Commerce and the Arts have flourished,' unlike in the dead and decadent culture of Anglican Virginia."[142] Jon Meacham wrote: "The idea of 'toleration' bothered Madison. Liberty was the issue, not tolerance, for 'tolerance' could mean the action of allowing something or granting permission. He seems to have asked Patrick Henry to make the case for a new phrase: 'the free exercise of [religion].'"[143]

In 1776 Jefferson served on a committee that considered petitions seeking separation of the Church of England as the official church of Virginia. His support was blocked by a legislative majority that had ties to the Anglican church. Cunningham wrote: "It would be ten years before his own ideas would triumph in the Virginia statute for religious freedom, for he favored nothing less than the disestablishment of the church of England and complete freedom of religion. He drew up resolutions to effect those purposes in 1776, but the outcome of the legislative struggle stopped with the repeal of all acts oppressive to dissenters and the passage of a bill exempting dissenters from contributing to the support of the Church of England."[144] In "Republican Notes on Religion and an Act Establishing Religious Freedom, Passed in the Assembly of Virginia" Jefferson wrote: "The present state of our laws on the subject of religion is this. The convention of May 1776, in their declaration of rights, declared it to be a truth, and a natural right, that the exercise of religion should be free; but when they proceeded to form on that declaration the ordinance of government, instead of taking up every principle declared in the bill of rights, and guarding it by legislative sanction, they passed over that which asserted our religious rights, leaving them as they found them." According to Jefferson, "We are answerable for them to our God. The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others. But it does me no injury for my neighbour to say there are twenty gods, or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg. If it be said, his testimony in a court of justice cannot be relied on, reject it then, and be the stigma on him. Constraint may make him worse by making him a hypocrite, but it will never make him a truer man. It may fix him obstinately in his errors, but will not cure them. Reason and free enquiry are the only effectual agents against error. Give a loose to them, they will support the true religion, by bringing every false one to their tribunal, to the test of their investigation. They are the natural enemies of error, and of error only. Had not the Roman government permitted free enquiry, Christianity could never have been introduced. Had not free enquiry been indulged, at the aera of the reformation, the corruptions of Christianity could not have been purged away." Jefferson added:

> "Difference of opinion is advantageous in religion. The several sects perform the office of a Censor morum over each other. Is uniformity attainable? Millions of innocent men, women, and children, since the introduction of Christianity, have been burnt, tortured, fined, imprisoned; yet we have not advanced one inch towards uniformity. What has been the effect of coercion? To make one half the world fools, and the other half hypocrites. To support roguery and error all over the earth. Let us reflect that it is inhabited by a thousand millions of people. That these profess probably a thousand different systems of religion. That ours is but one of that thousand. That if there be but one right, and ours that one, we should wish to see the 999 wandering sects gathered into the fold of truth. But against such a majority we cannot effect this by force. Reason and persuasion are the only practicable instruments. To make way for these, free enquiry must be indulged; and how can we wish others to indulge it while we refuse it ourselves. But every state, says an inquisitor, has established some religion. No two, say I, have established the same. Is this a proof of the infallibility of establishments? Our sister states of Pennsylvania and New York, however, have long subsisted without any establishment at all. The experiment was new and doubtful when they made it. It has answered beyond conception. They flourish infinitely. Religion is well supported; of various kinds, indeed, but all good enough; all sufficient to preserve peace and order: or if a sect arises, whose tenets would subvert morals, good sense has fair play, and reasons and laughs it out of doors, without suffering the state to be troubled with it."[145]

In their battle for disestablishment of the Anglican church, Jefferson and James Madison had the support of many non-Anglicans outside of the normal political aristocracy of Virginia - but they had the enmity of clergy and landowners inside it. Jefferson biographer Claude G. Bowers wrote that "because of his battle for democracy and religious freedom during these three years, he never again was to enjoy in Virginia the universal popularity he had known before."[146] Jefferson biographer Willard Sterne Randall noted: "As if to prove his conviction that each person should voluntarily support his own local church and clergyman, in 1777 Jefferson subscribed six pounds - more than double any other parishioner's contribution - to the annual support of the Rev. Charles Clay of St. Anne's Parish, Charlottesville, and wrote the subscription petition gratis."[147]

Nevertheless, Jefferson himself couldn't get his bill passed. Nearly seven years later, Madison could and did move the legislation to passage. In 1785 Madison wrote in his influential "Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments": "During almost fifteen centuries has the legal establishment of Christianity been on trial. What have been its fruits? More or less in all places pride and indolence in the Clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution."[148] Jefferson biographer Dumas Malone noted: "Sentiment had changed by the end of the year 1785, after he had crossed the Atlantic and James Madison had persuaded the legislators to give belated attention to the recommendations of the revisors. They were then ready to go as far as Jefferson desired in statutory enactment, but a considerable number of them demurred at his philosophical preamble. It was then proposed that a brief statement from the Declaration of Rights be substituted for it. This amendment was defeated by a large majority in the House of Delegates, but it bobbed up again in the Senate and would not down. In the end Madison agreed to the deletion of some of the more sweeping statements about the supremacy and illimitability of reason; and, as a result, the statute did not rest on quite so broad a base as the one its author had designed."

Political scientist Jack Rakove wrote: "Madison's springtime success in amending the religion article of the state's declaration of rights to recognize that 'all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion' had inspired Virginia's religious dissenters to flood the legislature with petitions urging it to take the even more radical step of disestablishing the Church of England, thereby depriving the province's official church of the public support on which it had always relied ."[149] Rakove wrote of Madison's bill: "Though its formal purpose was to disestablish the Anglican Church, its deeper animus was to free individuals from any obligation to adopt religious views they found unpersuasive. In Jefferson's view, all religious belief was finally a matter of individual opinion."[150]

In drafting the "Virginia Act For Establishing Religious Freedom" that finally passed in 1786, Jefferson had contended "that Almighty God hath created the mind free; that all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments or burdens, or by civil incapacitations, tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy and meanness, and are a departure from the plan of the Holy Author of our religion, who being Lord both of body and mind, yet chose not to propagate it by coercions on either, as was in his Almighty power to do; "

> that the impious presumption of legislators and rulers, civil as well as ecclesiastical, who, being themselves but fallible and uninspired men, have assumed dominion over the faith of others, setting up their own opinions and modes of thinking as the only true and infallible, and as such endeavoring to impose them on others, hath established and maintained false religions over the greatest part of the world, and through all time;
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> that to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves, is sinful and tyrannical; that even the forcing him to support this or that teacher of his own religious persuasion, is depriving him of the comfortable liberty of giving his contributions to the particular pastor whose morals he would make his pattern, and whose powers he feels most persuasive to righteousness, and is withdrawing from the ministry those temporal rewards, which proceeding from an approbation of their personal conduct, are an additional incitement to earnest and unremitting labors for the instruction of mankind; that our civil rights have no dependence on our religious opinions, more than our opinions in physics or geometry;
>
> that, therefore, the proscribing any citizen as unworthy the public confidence by laying upon him an incapacity of being called to the offices of trust and emolument, unless he profess or renounce this or that religious opinion, is depriving him injuriously of those privileges and advantages to which in common with his fellow citizens he has a natural right; that it tends also to corrupt the principles of that very religion it is meant to encourage, by bribing, with a monopoly of worldly honors and emoluments, those who will externally profess and conform to it;
>
> that though indeed these are criminal who do not withstand such temptation, yet neither are those innocent who lay the bait in their way; that to suffer the civil magistrate to intrude his powers into the field of opinion and to restrain the profession or propagation of principles, on the supposition of their ill tendency, is a dangerous fallacy, which at once destroys all religious liberty, because he being of course judge of that tendency, will make his opinions the rule of judgment, and approve or condemn the sentiments of others only as they shall square with or differ from his own;
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> that it is time enough for the rightful purposes of civil government, for its officers to interfere when principles break out into overt acts against peace and good order;
>
> and finally, that truth is great and will prevail if left to herself, that she is the proper and sufficient antagonist to error, and has nothing to fear from the conflict, unless by human interposition disarmed of her natural weapons, free argument and debate, errors ceasing to be dangerous when it is permitted freely to contradict them.[151]

In a letter from France in December 1786, Jefferson wrote Madison: "The Virginia act for religious freedom has been received with infinite approbation in Europe & propagated with enthusiasm. I do not mean by the governments, but by the individuals which compose them. It has been translated into French & Italian, has been sent to most of the courts of Europe, & has been the best evidence of the falsehood of those reports which stated us to be in anarchy."[152]

Madison believed that the law would actually encourage religion. Historian Garrett Ward Sheldon wrote: "The effect of religious liberty in Virginia confirmed Madison's assertion that Christianity was most vibrant and healthy in a free environment. Forty years later he wrote: 'there has been an increase of religious instruction since [then]....Religious instruction is now diffused throughout the community by preachers of every sect with almost equal zeal...and at private houses and open stations...the zeal which actuates them, the purity of their lives and the attendance of the people on their instructions.'"[153]

Near the end of his life in 1833, Madison wrote an inquiring minister about his ideas on religious freedom: "Waiving the rights of Conscience, not included in the surrender implied by the social State, and more or less invaded by all religious Establishments, the simple question to be decided is whether a support of the best & purest religion, the Xn religion itself ought, not so far at least as pecuniary means are involved, to be provided for by the Govt rather than be left to the voluntary provisions of those who profess it. And on this question experience will be an admitted Umpire, the more adequate as the connection between Govts & Religion have existed in such various degrees & forms, and now can be compared with examples where connection has been entirely dissolved.

> In the Papal System, Government and Religion are in a manner consolidated, & that is found to be the worst of Govts.
>
> In most of the Govts of the old world, the legal establishment of a particular religion and without or with very little toleration of others makes a part of the Political and Civil organization and there are few of the most enlightened judges who will maintain that the system has been favorable either to Religion or to Govt.
>
> Until Holland ventured on the experiment of combining a liberal toleration with the establishment of a particular creed, it was taken for granted, that an exclusive & intolerant establishment was essential, and notwithstanding the light thrown on the subject by that experiment, the prevailing opinion in Europe, England not excepted, has been that Religion could not be preserved without the support of Govt nor Govt be supported with an established religion that there must be at least an alliance of some sort between them.

> not be preserved without the support of Govt nor Govt be supported with an established religion that there must be a least an alliance of some sort between them. It remained for North America to bring the great & interesting subject to a fair, and finally to a decisive test.
>
> In the Colonial State of the Country, there were four examples, R.I, N. J., Penna, and Delaware, & the greater part of N. Y. where there were no religious Establishments; the support of Religion being left to the voluntary associations & contributions of individuals; and certainly the religious condition of those Colonies, will well bear a comparison with that where establishments existed.
>
> As it may be suggested that experiments made in Colonies more or less under the Control of a foreign Government, had not the full scope necessary to display their tendency, it is fortunate that the appeal can now be made to their effects under a complete exemption from any such Control.
>
> It is true that the New England States have not discontinued establishments of Religion formed under very peculiar circumstances; but they have by successive relaxations advanced towards the prevailing example; and without any evidence of disadvantage either to Religion or good Government.

Madison concluded:

> "The apprehension of some seems to be that Religion left entirely to itself may run into extravagances injurious both to Religion and to social order; but besides the question whether the interference of Govt in any form wd not be more likely to increase than Control the tendency, it is a safe calculation that in this as in other cases of excessive excitement, Reason will gradually regain its ascendancy. Great excitements are less apt to be permanent than to vibrate to the opposite extreme."
>
> Under another aspect of the subject there may be less danger that Religion, if left to itself, will suffer from a failure of the pecuniary support applicable to it than that an omission of the public authorities to limit the duration of their Charters to Religious Corporations, and the amount of property acquirable by them, may lead to an injurious accumulation of wealth from the lavish donations and bequests prompted by a pious zeal or by an atoning remorse. Some monitory examples have already appeared.[154]

Religious Freedom at the Federal Level

Personal beliefs did not necessarily dictate constitutional principles - even for such as strong advocate of religious tolerance and freedom as Madison, who served as one of Virginia's delegates to the Constitutional Convention. Historian Edwin S. Gaustad wrote: "When delegates to the Constitutional Convention gathered in Philadelphia in May 1787, religion seemed to most of them a matter best left to the states. Traditions and practices varied so widely that discussions about religion could only lead to dissension and delaying disagreements. The delegates to the Constitutional Convention took therefore only two modest steps with respect to religion, both of these being designed to avert problems, not raise them. First, the delegates agreed that 'no religious test' should ever be required of federal officeholders, and second, that one could 'affirm' rather than 'swear' in taking the oath of office - a clear concession to the tender consciences of Quakers."[155] When Benjamin Franklin proposed that sessions be opened with prayer, he was effectively ignored by fellow delegates.

The failure to include a Bill of Rights undermined efforts to ratify the Constitution in states like New Jersey and Virginia. Madison was successful in orchestrating passage at the Virginia ratifying convention with the help of Baptists whom he had earlier befriended. Historian Thomas S. Kidd wrote: "The Baptists were a small but critical constituency in gaining ratification. The dynamics of ratification proceeded differently in each state, but the Federalists' successful courtship of Baptist leaders...helped secure approval for the Constitution in Virginia and Massachusetts - where ratification passed by only small majority votes." But even after ratification of the Constitution by Virginia, Madison was targeted by anti-Federalists. He was denied election to the U.S. Senate and challenged for election to Congress by James Monroe. Again, his friendship with local Baptists proved critical to his success.

In May 1789 as a congressman in the first Congress under the Constitution, Madison announced he would introduce a Bill of Rights, which he proceeded to push through to passage. "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Historian Edwin S. Gaustad wrote: "With a breathtaking economy of words, the constitution now provided a double guarantee: first, that Congress shall do nothing to favor, promote, or endow religion; second, that Congress shall take no step that would impede, obstruct, or penalize religion."[156] Madison biographer Ralph Ketcham wrote that Madison "sought so forthrightly to use national power to insure maximum personal freedom that the nation at large refused to follow him. More clearly than any of his colleagues in nation building, Madison saw that effective, authoritative government and genuine liberty for the people were not only compatible but were in fact essential props for each other."[157]

With time, Madison's position regarding separation of church and state would further harden. Steven Waldman wrote "that Madison thought more separation was better than less, and strict separation - 'perfect separation' - was the best of all." Waldman wrote: "In almost every action, he conveyed support for strict separation of church and state. And he once again made it clear that he viewed the First Amendment as preventing many forms of federal government support for religion, not just blocking the creation of an official state church favoring one denomination."[158] By 1809 when Madison became president, he had become something of an absolutist on issues concerning separation of church and state - avoiding proclamations of thankgivings as president and privately writing against appointment of chaplains to the army or Congress. "The establishment of the chaplainship to Cong[res]s is a palpable violation of equal rights, as well as of Constitutional principles."[159]

In 1823, James Madison observed from his home in Virginia: "The settled opinion here is that religion is essentially distinct from Civil Govt. and exempt from its cognizance; that a connexion between them is injurious to both; that there are causes in the human breast, which ensure the perpetuity of religion without the aid of the law; that rival sects, with equal rights, exercise mutual censorships in favor of good morals; that if new sects arise with absurd opinions or overheated maginations, the proper remedies lie in time, forbearance and example; that a legal establishment of religion without a toleration could not be thought of, and with a toleration, is no security for public quiet & harmony, but rather a source itself of discord & animosity; and finally that these opinions are supported by experience, which has shewn that every relaxation of the alliance between Law & religion, from the partial example of Holland, to its consummation in Pennsylvania Delaware N. J., &c, has been found as safe in practice as it is sound in theory. Prior to the Revolution, the Episcopal Church was established by law in this State. On the Declaration of independence it was left with all other sects, to a self-support. And no doubt exists that there is much more of religion among us now than there ever was before the change; and particularly in the Sect which enjoyed the legal patronage. This proves rather more than, that the law is not necessary to the support of religion.[160]

With their Enlightenment mind set of rationality, many Founders like Madison were out of sync with the growing emotional content of religion in America. Rationality and revival both drove the Revolution and the Founding. Historian Thomas S. Kidd noted that "The birth of American evangelical Christianity in the 1740s resulted in the first widespread popular uprising against established authority in the history of British colonial America, and it heavily influence many of those who would fill the rank and file of the Patriot movement in the American Revolution."[161] Norman Cousins wrote: "It is significant that most of the Founding Fathers grew up in a strong religious atmosphere; many had Calvinist family backgrounds. In reacting against it, they did not react against basic religious ideas or what they considered to be the spiritual nature of man. Most certainly they did not turn against God or lose their respect for religious belief. Indeed, it was their very concern for the conditions under which free religious belief was possible that caused them to invest so much of their thought and energy into the cause of human rights."[162]

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